

Did you Know...

- 50% of women diagnosed with cervical cancer are between the ages of 35 and 55
- Cervical cancer occurs most often in Hispanic women; more than twice as many African-American women develop this cancer than non-Hispanic Caucasian women
- The five-year relative survival rate for the earliest stage of cervical cancer is 92%
- The overall (all stages combined) five-year survival rate is 73%
- Nearly 12,000 women are diagnosed annually with invasive cervical cancer; 1/3 of these women die from the disease
- Between 1955 and 1992 the number of deaths from cervical cancer dropped by 74%; the primary reason was regular Pap testing

—The American Cancer Society

Michele was seen at The James E. Van Zandt VA Medical Center in Altoona, Pennsylvania. VA Butler Healthcare wishes to extend its deepest gratitude to **Michele Kirsch** and her family for their courage and heartfelt desire to assist others through **her gift to us – her own story and message of love.** We offer Michele's family and friends our fond remembrance for her service, bravery, and generous outpouring of concern for others — and her commitment to share this message to female Veterans everywhere.

*“Love life and life will love you back.
Love people and they will love you back.”*

Arthur Rubinstein

VA Butler Healthcare

*...providing quality health care
to our nation's Veterans*

ARMSTRONG COUNTY VA OUTPATIENT CLINIC

Klingensmith Building
313 Ford Street, Suite 2B
Ford City, PA 16226
724.763.4090

CLARION COUNTY VA OUTPATIENT CLINIC

AC Valley Medical Center
855 Route 58, Suite One
Parker, PA 16049
724.659.5601

CRANBERRY TOWNSHIP VA OUTPATIENT CLINIC

Freedom Square
1183 Freedom Road, Suite A101
Cranberry Township, PA 16066
724.741.3131

LAWRENCE COUNTY VA OUTPATIENT CLINIC

Ridgewood Professional Centre
1750 New Butler Road
New Castle, PA 16101
724.598.6080

MICHAEL A. MARZANO VA OUTPATIENT CLINIC

295 North Kerrwood Drive, Suite 110
Hermitage, PA 16148
724.346.1569



butler.va.gov



facebook.com/VAButlerPA



twitter.com/VAButlerPA



talkshoe.com/tc/85029



A message from a fellow Veteran



“Don't wait ...”

VA Butler Healthcare
325 New Castle Road
Butler, PA 16001
800.362.8262
724.287.4781

facebook.com/VAButlerPA
twitter.com/VAButlerPA



A message from a fellow female Veteran...Don't wait

A Last Wish...and Michele's Message to Female Veterans

Michele was a U.S. Army Veteran who served from 1983 to 1986. She was married to Allen and they had two children, Amy and Josh. Michele died in 2006 of cervical cancer. She was only 40 years old.

Two weeks before her death, Michele had a last wish for female Veterans: to send a vital message to other female Veterans to take care of themselves and **get an annual pelvic exam and Pap smear.**

Prior to July 2005, Michele had refused the yearly offers of Pap tests, even though the risks of cervical cancer were explained to her. As so many others have done, Michele felt that she was much too young to worry about her health. She was too busy enjoying life – being a mother, wife, daughter, sister and friend. Besides, she thought, “I have no symptoms and I’m feeling fine.”

Michele went to the Women's Health Clinic at a VA Medical Center in Altoona, PA in late July 2005, complaining of abnormal vaginal bleeding. She consented to a Pap test. The catastrophic results of Michele's Pap test confirmed that she had stage 3 cervical cancer.

Cervical pre-cancers and early cancers usually show no symptoms. *Only after the cancer has become invasive to nearby tissue does a woman begin to experience symptoms. The most common symptom is abnormal vaginal bleeding.*

Michele's gynecologist attempted to perform a hysterectomy. But Michele's cancer was too advanced for surgical removal. Michele underwent radiation and chemotherapy but she did not overcome the incredible odds of survival. On May 19, 2006, we lost Michele to cervical cancer.

Michele Leaves a Legacy

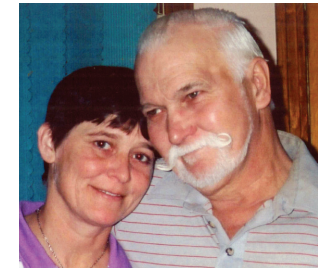
Michele felt so strongly about the importance of early detection for cervical cancer that she told her provider, “This test should be mandatory for all women veterans. You should withhold Veterans' benefits until these tests are done.” The VA informed Michele that they cannot violate a woman's right to make her own health care decisions but that they would help to spread the word and make Michele's message **a living legacy of informed care.**

Michele asked the Altoona VA to do what they could to help women make the right choice. She didn't want other women to experience what she went through. Michele said, “You shouldn't have to say goodbye to the ones you love this early in life. I hope this message will keep other women from making the same mistake I made.”

Human Papillomavirus infection [HPV] is the most common risk factor for cervical cancer. Other risk factors include smoking, HIV infection, Chlamydia infection, poor diet, oral contraceptives, multiple pregnancies, low income status, and DES [hormone used between 1940 and 1971].



Michele's children Amy and Josh with a portrait of Michele as they lovingly remember her.



Michele with her husband, Allen

Cervical cancer can be successfully treated if caught in its earliest pre-cancer stages. A yearly Pap test is a woman's best means of early detection of pre-cancer cells before they become cervical cancer.

Despite the obvious benefits of a Pap test, not all American women take advantage of it. Among American women with newly diagnosed invasive cervical cancer, between 60% - 80% have not had a Pap test in the past five years; many have never had a Pap test. In particular, elderly, African-American, and low-income women are less likely to have regular Pap tests.

Consider Michele's story...and her message to female Veterans. Schedule an annual pelvic exam and Pap Test...don't wait.

To learn more about cervical cancer, risk factors for cervical cancer or Pap testing, please call your VA Butler Healthcare primary care provider, gynecologist, or Women Veterans Program Manager at 800.362.8262, ext. 2756

Women Veterans Health Care
publichealth.va.gov/womenshealth

American Cancer Society
cancer.org/Cancer/index